



Libraries through the lens

University Library of Basel, Switzerland

THIS month's Libraries through the Lens is a return to the University of Basel in Switzerland for Thomas Guignard.

Toronto-based Thomas grew up in Switzerland and still has family and friends there. Travel restrictions – and the uncertainty around when they will be lifted – has made many people think more deeply about loved ones we are unable to see.

Thomas says: “Even though modern communication tools make it easy to stay in touch, I have found myself to be missing my family and friends in Switzerland even more since the coronavirus outbreak. While I wait for travel to be safe again so I can visit them, I can go through my photographic memories of past trips to Switzerland.

“This image of the main reading room of the University Library in Basel is replete with memories for me. I remember distinctly my first visit to this library. At the time, I was writing my undergraduate thesis on the acoustics of musical glasses and I had no idea I would eventually become a librarian myself.

“I came to Basel looking for a rare copy of the memoir written by the inventor of a glass instrument I was researching. I remember looking up briefly at the concrete hull of the reading room before heading for the book stacks to find what I came for. In contrast with the 1960s concrete of the reading room, the stacks were in an older building with creaking wooden floors and tight wrought iron staircases. In these

narrow stacks, I did eventually find the book I was looking for, but I think it's there that I also found my love for libraries.”

Thomas has returned to the library many times since then, in both a personal and professional capacity. He adds: “I have now learned that this part of the library is what remains from the university's first purpose-built library building, opened in 1896.

“The Neo-Baroque library by local architect Emanuel La Roche was largely demolished to make room for a newer building following the rapid expansion of the university after World War Two. The new library by another Basel architect, Otto Senn, was completed in 1965 and included the now iconic reading room and its soaring concrete ceiling.”